

對牛彈琴

dui4 niu2 tan2 qin2

Artist Antony Gormley's *Naked Man* sculptures on display at various locations in Hong Kong have prompted public complaints.

One of the life-size “anatomically correct” fiberglass sculptures placed on top of a building sparked fears of a suicide attempt with concerned passers-by calling the police.

Pedestrians considered another one installed on the pavement at Queen's Road Central an “obstruction.” Complaints were made to the Highways Department which then had to mark it off with a triangle of unsightly red-white-yellow mobile fences until it was decided, as procedures dictate, that it was, in fact, not an obstruction.

Art lovers may say by exhibiting his work to the Hong Kong public, Gormley is “對牛彈琴” (*dui4 niu2 tan2 qin2*).

“對” (*dui4*) is “in opposite position,” “facing,” “牛” (*niu2*) “a cow,” “彈琴” (*tan2 qin2*) “to play a musical

Idiom by Lon Yan

instrument.” Literally, “對牛彈琴” (*dui4 niu2 tan2 qin2*) is “to play music to a cow.”

Cows do not understand music and will not appreciate it, or at least that is what humans think. So the idiom means “to preach to deaf ears,” “to offer a treat to an unappreciative audience,” “wasting effort.”

The English expression “cast pearls before swine” has a similar meaning, which is “to waste something good on someone who doesn't care about it.”

But then not everyone is an art lover, and the work of an artist may not appeal to everyone. There is a saying that “One man's noise is another man's music.” It is also true, apparently, that one man's art may also be another man's (or woman's) obstruction.

Terms containing the character “牛” (*niu2*) include:

牛肉 (*niu2 rou4*) – beef

牛奶 (*niu2 nai3*) – milk

牛排 (*niu2 pai2*) – steak

牛仔褲 (*niu2 zai3 ku4*) – jeans